United Nations A/67/PV.1

General Assembly

Sixty-seventh session

Official Records

1st plenary meeting
Tuesday, 18 September 2012, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Jeremić ..... (Serbia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Opening of the session by the President of the General Assembly

The President: I declare open the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President: In accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Statement by the President

The President: It is my great honour to address members at the opening of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. I come from a proud, democratic country that I have been greatly privileged to serve in two successive terms as Foreign Minister. During that time, I addressed the General Assembly in the Hall on several occasions. Today, however, I do so for the first time as its President.

Before this greatest of parliaments, I pledge to faithfully serve the cause of the United Nations and to exercise my authority in a forthright and even-handed manner, with the utmost respect for the sovereign equality of the Member States.

At the onset of my remarks, allow me to express my deep appreciation for my predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser. I thank him and his Office for their tireless efforts in moving forward the agenda of the General Assembly and greatly increasing the visibility of this institution.

I would also like to take this opportunity to voice my sincerest gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his unfaltering commitment to the Organization's values and principles. Since taking office, he has presented a robust and visionary programme, while continuing to demonstrate strong leadership in dealing with the many complex issues that humankind faces. The two of us have had a solid and productive relationship so far, and I look forward to working even more closely with him throughout this session in my new capacity.

In addition, I would like to underline the importance I attach to strengthening cooperation with the other principal organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, as well as with the various entities and specialized agencies of the Organization.

Like my predecessors, I will work with civil society representatives. With notable exceptions, however, we have not yet found an efficient way to draw upon the tremendous capacities of the world's public policy institutes and think tanks. As President, I intend to launch a number of initiatives to harness their wisdom and experience.

My main responsibility, however, will be towards the Member States. I look forward to engaging with

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them in furtherance of shared goals and objectives. I will count particularly on my Vice-Presidents during the work of the General Committee during this session.

The General Assembly lies at the heart of the United Nations. It is the only forum where all Member States come together as sovereign equals to advance the aims of the Charter of the United Nations. Its preamble states that the Organization was established to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which has brought untold sorrow to mankind.

The maintenance of international peace and security was enshrined by our founders as the first stated purpose of the United Nations, in order to make it possible for human beings to live in greater prosperity, under a reign of peace founded on justice and universal respect for international law. Their vision must remain at the core of the Organization.

"We meet here amidst upheavals of unprecedented scope" were the words used by one of the most influential statesmen of our time, spoken a few months ago, to describe this period of our history. The resulting high level of geopolitical volatility will probably remain with us for quite some time. That will surely make it much more complicated to carry out our duties.

However much it may be wished, the United Nations is not in a position to solve all of the world's problems overnight. Yet for all its imperfections, which are, after all, inherent in any institution shaped by the human mind, I am strongly convinced that the Organization remains critical to addressing the growing needs of humankind. One simply cannot imagine a world in which peace and the dignity of all could flourish without the United Nations.

Having consulted widely on the matter, I have chosen "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means" as the overarching theme for our work over the next 12 months. It provides continuity with the work of previous sessions and builds on the priorities of the Secretary-General. I hope this framework will usefully serve the noble cause of preventing developing conflicts and resolving existing ones.

Peace and security is a prerequisite for the stability needed for global economic growth, sustainable development, and social progress. As President, I will work with Member States on bringing us closer to meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

In addition, we must focus on the post-2015 agenda. Our objective should be the full implementation of the mandate that this body received at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. That will require a decisive commitment to observe not only procedural deadlines, but also the political and financial objectives it has been designed to accomplish. That includes launching the process of identifying, and ultimately implementing, the sustainable development goals and placing the evolving sustainable development framework at the service of conflict prevention. I believe that will not only complement, but will decisively reinforce, all other efforts to strengthen international peace and security.

As President, I will also work with the Member States so that the General Assembly can improve global economic governance. Each in its own way — the Group of Eight, the Group of 20 (G-20), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and others — plays a critical role. However, I strongly believe that the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations ought to contribute more to the ongoing discourse about how to shape the material destiny of our planet.

Accordingly, I intend to convene an informal high-level meeting on the issue. Its aim would be to establish, in the next few years, an effective consultative framework between the General Assembly and international financial and trade institutions, including the G-20.

The General Assembly should endeavour to make progress in the fields of arms control and disarmament. As President, I will support efforts towards the achievement of a successful outcome to the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. I hope to engage with Member States on how present impasses in this critical area can be overcome, including those revolving around the Conference on Disarmament. I will also encourage Member States to sustain efforts on achieving the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

I will also urge the Assembly to strengthen the role of United Nations peacekeeping. I would like to engage with the membership on how we can more decisively support those who serve under the United Nations flag in conflict-ridden areas throughout the world. The presence of the United Nations on the ground is an

indispensable instrument of peace. For many decades, it has greatly contributed to reducing hostilities between belligerents, while helping to create an atmosphere of peace more conducive to the settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

Contemporary United Nations peacekeeping is both complex and continually evolving. I would like to recognize the growing role the African Union in partnership with the United Nations is playing in conflict prevention, management and resolution across the African continent. Other important regional actors, such as the European Union, are also increasing their participation in United Nations-led missions. As President, I will encourage the expansion of such activities. When a settlement is reached anywhere in the world, I believe that the General Assembly, coming together in consensus, can act as a moral guarantor of what has been agreed.

The fight against terrorism must also remain high on our agenda. On that issue, one of the most important instruments at our disposal remains the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. I also wish to underscore my view that efforts should be increased to finalize a draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism, in accordance with resolution 66/105. By working more closely together, we will send a clear message to those who finance, plan and engage in terror that history is not on their side. We must never yield to them. All available resources to help eliminate this global scourge need to be marshalled. Come what may, terror must be defeated.

Sixty-four years ago, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which solemnly linked respect for the inalienable rights of individuals with advancing the cause of peace and security. I strongly believe that the United Nations should continue to play a leading role in promoting and protecting human rights in the international arena. The General Assembly, together with the Human Rights Council, ought to devote greater attention to realizing what the Declaration called a "common standard of achievement". Highlighting urgent human rights situations is important work. In my view, that goal can be more readily advanced through a collaborative approach, not a confrontational one. During this session, the effort to strengthen and enhance the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system should continue.

I would also like to emphasize my steadfast commitment to ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women. As President, I will consult with Member States on how the General Assembly and UN-Women can work more closely together.

One issue of great concern remains the trafficking of women and combating violence against them. This is a heinous form of modern-day slavery. Unfortunately, it is one of the fastest growing criminal industries, rivalling the trafficking in illicit drugs and arms. During this session, the Assembly will be presented with an important appraisal of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which we adopted in 2010. I will work with Member States to ensure appropriate follow-up actions take place, so that we can help bring this appalling crime to an end.

On the final day of the sixty-sixth session, the General Assembly adopted its latest resolution on revitalization. As President, I will work with Member States, and with the Ad Hoc Working Group in particular, on identifying further ways to enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of that body, with a particular focus on implementing what has already been agreed. To revitalize this most universal of multilateral institutions is to renew our faith not only in the United Nations programmes and purposes, but also in each other. Member States can count on me to assist and facilitate in advancing the revitalization agenda, including the Security Council reform process.

Close to 800 years after the Magna Carta Libertatum was promulgated, many people around the world still do not enjoy the fundamental rights enshrined in that seminal document — rights that protect individuals while enabling countries to develop in peace and security as sovereign equals. That is why I believe the rule of law should remain high on the agenda of the sixty-seventh session. I urge Member States to agree on a consensus document by the beginning of the high-level debate on the rule of law, in a few days' time. As President, I will work closely with the General Assembly on implementing any mandate that may result from the meeting.

I will also seek to harness our efforts in tackling other important issues, including the promotion of indigenous peoples' rights and that of persons with disabilities.

Ivo Andrić, our Nobel Prize in laureate in literature, once wrote, "I am not afraid of human beings, but

of what is inhuman in them". Assuaging that fear by consciously seeking to tame our most primeval impulses has been a critical task of legislators and statesmen for millenniums. Such reasoning has informed the drafting of every just law, great constitution or lasting treaty. It also stands at the foundation of the United Nations Charter, a document that aims first and foremost to obviate the recourse to war. It is my sincere hope that our deliberations, properly conducted, will serve to reinforce the proposition that the United Nations is an indispensable element of international relations.

The challenges we will face over the next year will likely be great in number. As we begin the sixty-seventh session, let us never lose sight of our shared obligation to participate in the responsible stewardship of the purposes and principles of the Organization and remain dedicated to resolve our differences harmoniously through dialogue, not discordantly through confrontation. Let the tempered conduct of the best of those who came before us serve as a worthy signpost along our way. That can help enrich our perspective and, in so doing, strengthen the cause of establishing true and lasting peace in the world. Among all the leaders and statesmen ever to walk through the doors of the United Nations, few have been quite like Dag Hammarskjöld, whose life came to an abrupt end exactly 51 years ago today.

As we reflect on what lies ahead during the sixty-seventh session, we might draw inspiration from what he wrote down not long before his death:

> "Never measure the height of a mountain until you have reached the top. Then you will see how low it was ... Never look down to test the ground before taking your next step; only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find the right road ... Never, `for the sake of peace and quiet', deny your own experience and convictions."

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: The opening of each session of the General Assembly coincides with the beginning of autumn in the northern hemisphere. But to me, there is also a feeling of spring. There are new hopes on the scene, new issues to be addressed, new ways of conducting our business. Our challenge is to make that initial sense of hope more than a fleeting moment, to turn today's good will into a lasting record of progress for the world's people.

I wish to renew my congratulations to Mr. Vuk Jeremić on taking up his duties as President of this body. There has been a good transition between the Assembly's new President and his predecessor. I thank His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for his leadership during the past eventful year. There has also been good coordination between the new President's Office and mine. That bodes well for the work ahead. Mr. President, you can count on me and on my full support.

As usual, the Assembly faces a long and urgent agenda. Next week will also feature many important high-level meetings and initiatives on energy, women's health, nutrition and education, as well as on peace and security challenges, such as the very complex and very urgent situation in the Sahel region. The deteriorating situation in Syria will also be foremost in our minds. Member States are currently negotiating the outcome of the High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law. I urge them to forge a document that sends a strong signal of commitment to the rule of law at the national and international levels alike. We are also embarking together on crucially important efforts to establish sustainable development goals and to articulate a post-2015 development agenda. We are continuing our push to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as the deadline approaches.

Mr. President, you have proposed that next week's general debate should focus on the peaceful settlement of international disputes. I welcome that theme. One of my main priorities as Secretary-General has been to promote prevention and peaceful means of resolving differences. There is great unexplored potential in that area. We are living through a period of unease. We are also seeing incidents of intolerance and hatred that are then exploited by others. Voices of moderation and calm need to make themselves heard at this time. We all need to speak up in favour of mutual respect and understanding of the values and beliefs of others. The United Nations itself must rise to the moment.

The Organization is being asked to do more than ever before. People want results in real time, not in years. That is why we will also be working together during this session to deepen our efforts to strengthen and modernize the United Nations itself.

Finally, let us take note of today's sad anniversary of the death of my illustrious predecessor, Dag Hammarskjöld. His example and his wisdom continue to inspire. That is crucial for delivering on our mandate.

In your acceptance speech, Sir, you said that it was your hope that the session ahead would help to reach the day when humankind will have abolished fear. Let us all work together to make that hope come true. I wish everyone well for a productive sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Item 134 of the provisional agenda

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/67/337)

The President: In keeping with established practice, I would like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/67/371, which contains a letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the Assembly in which he informs the Assembly that five Member States are in arrears with respect to their financial contributions to the United Nations under the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter,

> "A Member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I therefore take it that the General Assembly takes note of the information contained in document A/67/371?

It was so decided.

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Credentials of representatives to the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly

(a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee

The President: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly at the beginning of each session shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the sixty-seventh session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Angola, China, Peru, the Russian Federation, Seychelles, Sweden, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America.

May I take it that the States that I have just mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Organization of work of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly

Letter from the Chair of the Committee on Conferences (A/67/352)

The President: Members are aware that, pursuant to paragraph 7 of section I of resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly may meet at United Nations Headquarters during the main part of a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

On the strict understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services, authorization is thus sought for the following subsidiary organs: the Board of Auditors; the Committee on Relations with the Host Country; the Independent Audit Advisory Committee; the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Disarmament Commission; the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination; and the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to authorize these subsidiary organs of the Assembly to meet during the main part of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 3.40 p.m.